
Managing the Correctional Resource: The Three R's

The terrorist attacks of September 11 and the more recent Wall Street scandals have all played a role in the decline in tax base revenues. The change in economic outlook has required governments to adjust their spending priorities. The result in most jurisdictions has been to curtail new monies and, in some cases, to reduce allocations to existing correctional budgets.

In an early response to projected revenue shortfalls, agencies froze budgets, cut travel, and made across-the-board percentage cuts to budgets. This was a crisis response rather than a strategic response to the problem. If we are entering a new era of restraint management, an era that might last a decade or more, we need to consider more strategic responses. I intend to outline in this article how jurisdictions outside of the U.S. are responding to budget cutbacks. I hope that by doing so I can give the reader a different perspective and, by contrast and distance, a sense of what he or she might do locally. The article will examine restraint management principles, re-allocation of budgets, and re-positioning strategies.

I should make clear at the outset that, from an international perspective, the agencies I have contacted have not seen the same degree of cutback to their community corrections budgets as U.S. jurisdictions have experienced. In fact, in some cases, their community corrections budgets have actually increased as a result of some strategic decisions made by these agencies.

Restraint Management

Governments today are caught in an enormous vice that continues to squeeze budgets as revenues fail to match increased demands. As this happens, administrators are required to manage cutbacks, program contractions, program terminations, and the freezing or elimination of privileges that had been regarded as non-negotiable rights and entitlements.

Managing well in a restraint environment requires learning to handle organizational change. What this has meant in the past was learning to do more with less—maintaining current levels of service with fewer resources; but eventually, in some circumstances, it has meant cutting services because of lack of money and staff. It is this aspect of restraint management that is difficult. One reason for this is that cutbacks, while painful for any organization, are especially hard for organizations that are labor-intensive and are driven by ideological goals—such as most probation and community corrections departments. As one interviewee from Ontario, Canada, noted, “There is inevitably some negative reaction on the

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part of many staff who genuinely believe that budgetary reductions will reduce the quality of services that they have spent a lifetime working to develop.”

Restraint management involves making difficult decisions regarding staffing and service delivery in a context of scarce resources. In a restraint environment, the staff’s acceptance of change is made more difficult because the usual rewards offered to gain consensus are unavailable. Organizational change is much easier to accomplish when staff have something to gain by the change. Other constraints facing administrators are imposed by professional norms and collective bargaining agreements.

All these pressures add up to another problem surrounding restraint management: the management of staff morale. Low staff morale makes it difficult for managers to compensate for staff layoffs by increasing the productivity of remaining staff. Because most correctional agencies are labor-intensive, cutback management usually means reductions in staff numbers. There is often a fall-out from staff reductions, of course. In some of the jurisdictions examined, the reductions have been at management levels, but this decision may eventually create a morale problem as well, as individuals have nowhere to go in the organization. You can sustain staff reductions in the short term, but there is no question that cutbacks threaten the morale of staff who are working harder for less.

A sign that an agency is using restraint management techniques is the imposition of a hiring freeze and ceilings on staffing levels. Currently, in Canada at both the provincial and federal level, restraint management is being used in the short term, while the agencies attempt to apply more strategic approaches to the problem.

Faced with budget reductions, the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) is also adopting an aggressive strategic planning approach based on creating scenarios that emerge from an extensive environmental scanning exercise. The idea is to think about the environment in 2017 and then work backwards to the current situation—but always focused on what the correctional service would need to be and look like in 2017. Out of this process, they hope to develop a plan that will be a vehicle to translate goals, principles, and legislative mandates into specific and clear program directions. This process is still being worked on, and there are no concrete actions regarding the budget reductions yet. However, changes are expected in the next funding cycle; the hope is that these changes will meet short-term exigencies without violating long-range plans.

Because a major cost to the Canadian correctional system is related to rates of incarceration and parole revocations, it is apparent that if some gains can be made in reducing either of these, a substantive savings is likely to occur. In the planning process, CSC is exploring ideas related to the following:

- ◆ Improvements to community-based alternatives to incarceration;
- ◆ Improvements in the efficacy of parole supervision; and

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- ◆ An increase in the availability of community programs promoting behavioral change in offenders.

Based on the results of its own research and the research of others, CSC believes that programs and services that successfully integrate offenders into the community share the following traits:

- ◆ The programs have been developed with or by community agencies.
- ◆ The programs are multi-disciplinary in their approach.
- ◆ The programs are evidence-based and have demonstrated their role in reducing re-offending.
- ◆ The programs are flexible and can be responsive to the offender's situation in a community setting.
- ◆ The programs provide a continuum of support for the offender.
- ◆ The programs don't operate in isolation, but build on existing programs and services.

Behind the approach being attempted by CSC is the notion that cooperative community correctional initiatives are the key to success. This approach combines solid, evidence-based programming with proactive supervision, and it invites the active participation of community and social service agencies.

Involved in this approach to restraint management are the following strategic components:

- ◆ Clear vision and defined mission of the agency;
- ◆ Reliance on partnerships;
- ◆ Formal standards and policy directives;
- ◆ Programs and activities based on research and best practices;
- ◆ Optimization of resources and workload monitoring; and
- ◆ Development of required tools and techniques.

Whether CSC can meet the short-term budget reductions and maintain a fixed focus on the longer term will be determined by the outcome of the current planning sessions. Nevertheless, CSC's experience provides at least a glimpse into how one

jurisdiction is attempting to manage a restraint approach in responding to current cuts in appropriations.

Reallocation of Budgets

Other correctional systems are facing not budget cutbacks but an entirely different dilemma. In a sense, the correctional system is being asked to do “more with more.” In this scenario, corrections agencies are given more funds and, in a results-oriented environment, are expected to deliver tangible reductions in the use of expensive prison space. Here the government wants to gain more value from its expenditures in the correctional arena. This I call the “reallocation of budget” approach. A prime example of this approach is the one taken by the State of Victoria in Australia. In this model, the government has found funds from other sources (probably other departments) and channeled them to the correctional department for specific purposes.

The Victoria government has put a massive injection of additional money into corrections—a total of \$334.5 million (Australian dollars) spread over the next 4 years. The funds are intended to pay for a new 600-bed maximum-security prison, a 300-bed dedicated prison for programs, and a 120-bed minimum-security prison. These monies are partly designed to increase capacity, but mostly they are intended to replace three existing smaller, outdated prisons. The funds also include nearly \$70 million to develop rehabilitative and diversionary programs, plus \$42 million to revitalize community corrections.

From discussions with officials in Victoria, it appears that their government hopes to cap prison bed capacity at approximately 3,700. However, given the growth in prison populations over the past 5 or 6 years, the government has also acknowledged that community corrections needed a significant boost if the hoped-for savings from diversionary approaches were to be realized. Prior to this, it had become clear that the utilization rates for community corrections sentencing options in the State of Victoria were the lowest in Australia—although it must be acknowledged that Victoria also has the lowest rate of imprisonment in Australia.

One thing community corrections administrators achieved was to get accurate information on what was happening at the court level. One of their findings was that about 60% of all court dispositions resulted in a fine as the sanction. Because of problems in another part of the system, however, the fine defaulters were not being picked up. This resource issue had an impact on the Community Corrections Division (probation in Victoria is called “community corrections”). When a fine is defaulted, the Sheriff’s Office executes a warrant to bring the defaulter back to court, where he is usually placed under community supervision. Because the Sheriff’s Office was not picking up the fine defaulters, however, community corrections caseloads had declined. Although these low caseloads were initially seen as a result of the court’s lack of confidence in Community Corrections, accurate information about the situation eventually made clear that the low caseloads were actually a result of the Sheriff’s Office’s failure to pick up defaulters. Thus, one immediate lesson for administrators is the need for a good

management information system so that you can be sure that the results that are being asked of you in a resource re-allocation context can be realized.

The funding of community corrections redevelopment in Victoria is predicated on achieving targeted front-end diversion from prison of 350 beds over the 4-year life span of the redevelopment initiative. This specific goal may present problems, especially if the information on which the decision was based turns out to be faulty. In addition, this goal does not take into account the actions of judges. If judges have little or no confidence in the supervision and services being provided, they might make decisions that make it difficult for Community Corrections to meet the targeted goal. Similarly, if Community Corrections successfully persuades the court that it has or is building capacity, the agency might find itself with increased revocations, thus defeating the original intent of the funding. This is the tightrope the current Community Corrections administration is walking.

The leaders feel that they could make better use of the resources and achieve targeted results if they could persuade their own correctional system that they have a greater capacity to influence prison numbers at the back-end of the sentence. For example, their research has shown that some offenders' parole is delayed for lack of an effective parole plan. This suggests that the creation of additional specialist staff to work on throughcare preparation and post-release support should have a positive impact on release rates.

The Victoria Community Corrections administrators also believe that they have a much greater capacity to influence outcomes in the way they manage offenders who fail to comply with supervision conditions. In Victoria, 70% of all breaches are for non-compliance with conditions rather than for re-offending. Traditionally, many staff have seen it as their duty to send cases back to court at the first sign of instability or non-cooperation. The department is trying to negotiate a range of intermediate sanctions through a carefully crafted discretion policy, which the courts would endorse, allowing the agency to manage minor breaches without going back through the courts. Since imprisonment for minor breaches of supervision orders uses an expensive resource, they believe it is worthwhile to invest in intermediate sanctions before invoking a prison sentence.

Currently, the daily average population of offenders in Community Corrections in Victoria has increased by about 200 compared to a year ago. Although it is a little early to judge the results, it appears that the strategy of re-allocating resources to Community Corrections may be having the desired result. The main lessons to learn from this particular approach are as follows:

- ◆ The importance of a good management information system;
- ◆ The need to develop a relationship with the courts;
- ◆ The importance of developing an understanding with institutional corrections;

- ◆ The value of discharge planning and support for offenders returning to the community;
- ◆ The use of intermediate sanctions for minor breaches of conditions; and
- ◆ The importance of targeted goals and a results-oriented approach.

Re-Positioning Strategies

Finally, the last approach that seems to be in use as a means of managing budget reductions is also a macro-level approach. I call this the “re-positioning strategy.” In a number of countries, following the lead of the U.S., governments have turned their attention to domestic security in light of the terrorist threat. This has led some jurisdictions to consider either aligning or amalgamating police and correctional departments into public safety or security agencies and giving them added responsibilities to respond to domestic threats. Here, governments are attempting to get more value for public safety expenditures by saving on infrastructure costs; merging police and correctional resources can reduce administration costs. They know that it is easier from a political point of view to make money available for security services than for offenders. In this approach, the upper management levels are more at risk for reductions than front-line staff.

This is the approach apparently taken by the Government of Ontario in Canada. It recently combined the Ministry of the Solicitor General (with oversight over police, fire, and emergency measures in the province) with the Ministry of Correctional Services (responsible for provincial jails, prisons, and adult and juvenile probation). This merger made possible a reduction of one cabinet minister and a deputy minister and a reduction in administrative and support staff and services.

It is a little early to determine the outcome of this approach, but it is seen as facilitating the government’s public safety agenda. In terms of probation, the merger will strengthen initiatives that were already under way. These initiatives included the development of a new service delivery model that attempts to operationalize the research finding that indicates the importance of intervening more with higher-risk offenders than with lower-risk offenders. Part of the strategy for dealing with higher-risk offenders was not only to provide more program opportunities but also to develop police/probation partnerships. The police/probation partnerships were designed to enhance supervision of the more serious offenders, including sex offenders and those convicted of crimes against a person.

Another initiative under development is a fairly extensive electronic monitoring program for offenders sentenced to conditional sentences. (Conditional sentences in Canada are specifically intended for an offender that the judge would have imprisoned if this sanction was not available to the court.) The judges had not been using this sanction because they feared that current supervision approaches were not rigorous enough. The Ministry is attempting to respond to this issue, and if the judges respond appropriately, admissions to provincial prisons should be reduced. The goal is to secure public safety and to achieve reductions in the cost of imprisonment.

This re-positioning strategy is also being used in a number of different ways at more micro-levels in other jurisdictions. For example, the shift to a public safety agenda is a way of re-positioning traditional probation to meet new expectations. In many parts of Europe, where there has traditionally been a social work orientation to probation, there has been a re-positioning in recent years of the mission of probation to include a stronger emphasis on public safety and victims' rights. This change opens the door to new stakeholders who can help support probation and community correction agencies in the budget battles.

Potential lessons to glean from this approach point to the importance of:

- ◆ Developing closer alignment with community sentiments;
- ◆ Developing new alliances with traditional criminal justice partners;
- ◆ Cultivating new stakeholders; and
- ◆ Realizing savings from reduction in infrastructure and overhead administrative costs.

Conclusion

All three of these models for coping with budget changes are in use in varying degrees of intensity in many places. By far the most dominant model is the restraint management model, but the other two offer the possibility of creating a hybrid model to suit local needs. Regardless of the models adopted, administrators and managers are likely to find themselves asking the same basic questions:

- ◆ What things can we stop doing?
- ◆ What things can we get others to do?
- ◆ What things can we do more efficiently and effectively?
- ◆ Where can we use lower-cost or no-cost labor (i.e., volunteers or community contracts with voluntary agencies)?
- ◆ Where can we substitute capital/technology for labor?
- ◆ What skills and knowledge do we need in our workforce now and in the future?

The ways in which community corrections administrators answer these questions will determine how successful they will be in managing in a period of budget cutbacks. ■

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